



EIGHTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) held its 82nd meeting in London on 29th April 2004, when it discussed the following matters:

USES OF UK COLLAGEN FROM HIDES OF UK CATTLE

In 1999 the Bovine and Bovine Products (Trade) Regulations 1999 (BBPT Regulations), prohibited the production of collagen from UK bovine hides for non-technical uses. SEAC were asked to consider the risk implications if this legislation was amended to allow the sourcing of collagen from hides of UK bovines for non-technical use. SEAC were content with the proposed use of UK collagen for food use as the potential risk would be minimal given that the collagen would be sourced from animals fit for human consumption. In considering the risk implications for use of UK derived collagen in pharmaceutical and medical products, SEAC asked for additional information on the regulations governing end-use of collagen in these products. SEAC asked for further information on the prevalence of BSE in UK and other European countries before they could consider the relative risk of sourcing European versus UK derived bovine material.

SURVEY OF HISTORIC BUTCHERY PRACTICES

SEAC considered the results of the survey of historic butchery practices undertaken by DNV Consulting on behalf of the Food Standards Agency. The survey was commissioned following a report of an investigation by the Leicestershire Health Authority into a cluster of vCJD cases in the village of Queniborough which suggested that local butchery practices may have constituted a high risk in terms of transmission of infected material.

SEAC agreed with the conclusions of the survey that showed that the butchery practices in the Leicestershire area were not sufficiently different from the rest of the UK to provide a simple explanation for the cluster of vCJD cases. Although the survey confirmed that at that time, brain matter did go into the human food chain, there had been no observed increase in vCJD cases in those groups (older persons) thought to have been most likely to have consumed bovine brains. Also the survey suggested that much bovine brain produced in the UK at that time was exported to France rather than used for domestic consumption.

vCJD UPDATE

SEAC was updated on the latest statistics from the National CJD surveillance unit. Up until April 2004, a total of 146 vCJD cases have been confirmed in the UK, including 5 cases still alive. All vCJD cases tested to date are of the same genotype at codon 129 of the PrP gene (methionine homozygous). Short-term analysis of the number of deaths from vCJD in the UK continues to show statistically significant evidence that the epidemic is no longer increasing exponentially and at least in the short term, the epidemic may have peaked or come to a plateau.